



# PSYCHOLOGICAL ELEMENTS IN WILLIAM GOLDING'S LORD OF THE FLIES

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By 1940 Europe was in midst of one of the most horrifying phases of human history. In the wake of the first world war back to an economic and social normalcy. The destruction of the social, political, economic and spiritual structures of society had left the human masses in state of shock. Despite the damage caused by the greed and ambition of the nation many rulers still craved for power and glory twisting scientific advancement into pseudoscientific mumbo-jumbo to suit their individual megalomaniac aspiration those in power across Europe abandoned all sense of moral responsibility and went on to pursue their bloodthirsty goals on hand the establishment of 'The League of Nations' in Europe signify a moral sense of upholding society and human rights. Contradictorily establishment of dictatorial regimes seemed to overwhelm the moral standing of 'the League of Nations'. The clash between the 'supposed' moral stance of League of Nations and the juggernaut of Nazi and fascist advancement lead to the greatest spectacle in the arena of human history. At a psychological level the raw undiluted aspiration for power demonstrated by the Nazis and the fascist can be analysed as being rooted in human psyche while the conscientious stance of the league of nation is again a facet of human psyche.

History as being played out in Europe could be understood retrospectively according to the terms explaining components of the human psyche as proposed by Sigmund Freud- the father of modern psychology. Till the latter part of the 19th century Europeans were mostly religious and looked at the world through the lens of Christianity. However with Darwin's insights into the origins of 'human race' European society was torn between the 'Risen Ape' of evolution and the 'Fallen Angel of Eden'. Freud's explication of the human mind subsumed the religious concept of the human soul and the moral, immoral and amoral aspects of the soul got transformed into logical psychological facets of the human mind. Sigmund Freud proposed that the human mind could be divided into:

- a. Id
- b. Ego
- c. Superego

William Golding's Lord of the Flies is one of the most important landmarks of twentieth century literature that not only exposes the deepest psychological recesses of the human mind but also seems to shed light on the recent violent past of the two World Wars. Golding wrote at a time when the violent bloodshed of the wars was fresh in the minds of the people who had suffered in the wars. On one hand most of the European populace being Christian believed that 'man was created in god's image' thus man was innately 'good' and evil was something that invaded man from outside. On the other hand towards the beginning of the twentieth century Sigmund Freud had pointed out that the human mind could be divided into the Id, Ego and the Superego. Whereas the Id was the wild unrestrained primitive component of the human mind which was usually controlled by the superego.

The Id as defined by Freud represents the raw primordial survival urges of all living beings. The ego becomes the identity /self-image of all humans. While the superego represents the social and moral authority acting upon an individual till it becomes his/her inner voice (conscience) Sir William Golding seems to have applied this psychological concepts to the analysis of human history playing out in Europe during the World War while depicting the power struggle among the boys on the island. Sir William Golding was former school teacher for boys and was aware of the truth about the behaviour of the boys. Contrary to what society believed about young boys, he has pre-teen boys engaging in power struggle that is parallel to the historical clashes at the international level. The Island becomes a microcosm with opposing sides struggling for ultimate domination; while on the island it is young boys involved in the struggle, at a higher level across the world nations indulged in same games.

In the interview to the BBC Sir William Golding in reply to the question 'why he choose only boys for characters in the novel answered that he wanted the novel to focus only on the 'power struggling' without any distraction of sex or other issues. Ralph and Jack the protagonist and the antagonist of the novel respectively clash as opposing forces for domination of the island. The struggle between the two

groups lead by Ralph and Jack become almost parallel to the two major opposing forces at the historical level viz. the 'Allies' and the 'Axis'. The novel begins with the elimination of all adults leaving the boys to themselves on the deserted island – something uncannily similar to the almost childishly petulant world leaders in Europe with unlimited power and weapons at their disposal. At the geopolitical level with the deterioration of the power of the authoritative parent like League of Nations economic and martial powers started acting like bullies. On one hand Hitler declared 'Germany is where Germans are' on the other hand Stalin started consolidating power by encroaching upon East European nations. As their power increased more nations with war like tendencies started aligning themselves with this mighty nations. In the novel without the control of any authoritative adult the boys try to establish a semblance of order when they elect Ralph as a leader and declaring 'The Conch' as symbol of authority. However faced with rejection Jack Merridew goes off nursing a grudge against Ralph and tries to consolidate power by rousing his team of choirboys. At the international level weaker nation fearing the power of the bigger nations established treaties and ententes with leaders and nation they thought would protect them against invasion and warfare. However just as the Conch is smashed to smithereens when Jack and his tribe violate all authority and rules and go on to prove that 'Might is Right'. At the global level the powerful nations demolished the authoritative standing of the 'League of Nations' by directly violating its agreements. Jack becomes a school boy version of Hitler and Stalin disregarding all sense of decorum in society; on the psychological level by smashing the Conch Jack and his tribe had reverted to the savage primordial urges of the unfettered Id by destroying the sensible voice of the superego.

In the wake of the death and destruction brought upon the civilized world by the likes of Hitler and Mussolini, the world was shaken out of its religious complacency about the grandeur of the nature of humanity. Being a school teacher for boys Golding was familiar with the cruelty and sadism the little boys indulged in towards each other. Quite contrary to the biblical belief that children are loving and forgiving Golding had observed how cruelly they bullied one another. In the novel he creates a realistic picture of how a group of young boys without any social or moral authority over them deteriorates to almost bestial levels. Though the book was controversial at the time of its publication, scholars and critics have realized its true value hence. The novel still remains a powerful study in social dynamics and human interaction, as well as authority and society in the twenty first century.

As the novel progresses the boys are caught up in a vortex of violence and dragged deeper and deeper into the darker chaotic recesses of the human psyche till they have lost all sense of their prim English schoolboy attitudes and are reduced to savage animals hunting each other in the jungle. At the global level armies with ultra-modern weapons marched across borders indiscriminately slaughtering innocent and unarmed men, women and children. The savage marching armies find their parallel in the bunch of schoolboys with war paint trying to hunt one of their own with improvised spears in the burning jungle of the deserted island. Humans both on the island and the global level had shed off all sense of societal morality and fraternity to become beasts motivated solely by their baser urges. During the early forties civilization had almost broken down and humans became predator and prey no different from the beast in the jungle.

A few days on the Island had completely eroded the thin veneer of propriety and civilized conduct leaving the boys no different from savage beasts. The novel poses several disturbing questions about society, humanity and our own existence. Sir William Golding is neither moralistic nor sanctimonious as he takes us through the gradual transformation of the boys. Though at the end of the novel the boys revert back to weepy schoolboys from blood thirsty savages at the sight of a British Naval Officer the larger question remains what would induce human society to realize the folly of global warfare. While the young boys revert instantaneously to being schoolboys from savages, at the global level War still rages on. The question remains whether civilization is such a thin veneer that can be so easily chipped away as to leave humans no different from beasts. In the modern context I would like to draw your attention to terrorism, geo-political instability and communal clashes raging across the globe even today in the 21st century as

humans turn into savage beasts everyday everywhere.

I will leave you to reflect on what the future has in store for us and the next generation if we continue on the path we are rushing on to.

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